

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. DEFAZIO) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. DEFAZIO addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. PENCE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. PENCE addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New Mexico (Mr. PEARCE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. PEARCE addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON-LEE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. PRICE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. PRICE of Georgia addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

FRESHMEN DEMOCRATS PROMOTE ACCOUNTABILITY AND OVERSIGHT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. KLEIN) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. KLEIN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I am RON KLEIN, and I represent Florida's 22nd Congressional District in Congress, which is southeast Florida, Fort Lauderdale to West Palm Beach area, and I have the privilege of anchoring tonight's freshmen's Special Order. We decided as a group of freshman, and there was a large group of us that were elected this year, to meet on a regular basis and to discuss policy, those of us who had contested races, those of us who did not have contested races, but all of us new with this process coming in with a fresh perspective and the belief that hopefully we could influence the process in a way that would move things along, which is, I think, the loud message we heard from the people that elected all of us, both Democrats and Republicans this year.

Tonight our Special Order is going to focus on the importance of accountability and oversight within our Nation's government. There is no question that the ability to exercise ac-

countability and oversight among the executive and legislative branches, that is our branch and the President's branch, is vital to making sure that our government is operating and governing within the highest ethical and moral standards, and makes sense. It is also important to make sure our government is doing the right thing for our people.

It seems that every time we are turning on the news lately or pick up the newspaper, there seems to be some story about where there is no accountability. And the oversight and lack of accountability seems to be the prime topic of conversation back home in our districts, in our offices, in our supermarkets, in our churches and synagogues. If you just think about the most recent one, the United States attorney scandal, where a number of U.S. attorneys were fired; and, of course, there is a question about for what purpose they were fired and whether there is a reason, and now there is a question of getting all the information out on the table.

The ongoing concerns over Valerie Plame and the outing of Valerie Plame. And, of course, I think most of us as Americans understand, when someone works for this country as a member of our intelligence services, we owe that person the highest degree of respect and integrity and make sure that their position is held confidential. And certainly anybody who is responsible for outing that person should be held accountable and punished.

Conditions at Walter Reed Hospital. And we are going to talk about that a little more tonight, and, unfortunately, other veterans hospitals. And I am happy to say that in my area and in many other parts of the country that there are some very good things going on in our veterans hospitals and our veterans outpatient clinics, but many times it is a matter of having the resources to have enough doctors in place. And I know I have heard from time to time about long waiting lines. But there are places like Walter Reed and other places that have now been identified where you had mold and you had ceilings falling in and lack of care, and people that were working there that were overworked and unfortunately not providing the type of treatment that should be awarded. The highest level of respect should be awarded to our men and women who are our heroes in this country.

And, of course, the no-bid government contracts being awarded to companies doing business in Iraq to the tune of billions of dollars of waste, and certainly not accomplishing the major goals. One of the goals we went in there with, of course, was to take out Saddam Hussein, but I think everybody understood very quickly that if we were going to be successful in changing the hearts and minds, that some of the rebuilding activities, getting electricity on, getting hospitals up, creating jobs, those kinds of things would

be very, very important to making the people of Iraq feel that this was a worthy cause to set up their own government. Unfortunately, we have spent billions of our money over there, and, unfortunately, the condition is in many ways worse today than it was with the fall of Saddam Hussein.

The news on these subjects is everywhere. So tonight we are going to talk about accountability and oversight, and my colleagues who are going to join me tonight as freshman Members recently elected are going to be talking about how we are working to restore those features of accountability and oversight to Washington and our government.

A couple things I just want to touch on before I turn over to my colleague Congressman HODES. On November 7, which was last year's election, we believe that the American people, I know we all heard this as we walked door to door and heard from the American people, they wanted change. It wasn't necessarily Democrat or Republican; they wanted people to come together, find common ground, and move forward. And fortunately for this country, this House has, in fact, started that process. There were six items very quickly that were passed in the beginning called the 100 Hours, the Six for '06, everything from fixing the Medicare prescription drug program, which I know many of our seniors are concerned about making it easier to use, less costly to the taxpayers; minimum wage, making the minimum wage higher, of course, is a key issue; lower student loan rates; and a number of other issues like energy policy. These are the things that we came to work on and that were done.

We also passed the lobbying reform bill and a full disclosure bill which has already significantly reduced the influence that lobbyists have on this legislative process. We need to do more, but we certainly took a lot of the right steps by not allowing lobbyists to take Members of Congress out to lunch. We had that in Florida, we changed that, and I am glad we changed that here, too.

And, of course, the earmark process. And for those of you who don't know what earmark is, that is this idea: In the past, Congressmen, Members of the Senate and House, would go behind closed doors and add millions and tens of millions of dollars, even hundreds of millions in some cases, of special projects in the dark of night to the budget without any consideration by all the Members of Congress. And that needs to change, and I am very happy to say that with new earmark reforms in place, that will change.

The way it is changing is very clear: Anything that is presented needs to be presented in the light of day. It needs to be publicly disclosed and laid out for the Members of the Congress so that a legitimate project in Alaska should be a legitimate project in Florida. Even though it may benefit one State, we all